



The winter-feeding period is the most expensive stage in most Irish ruminant production systems. Therefore, it is critical that animal nutrition is tailored correctly to each animal group to optimise animal performance.

Silage quality is key to good animal performance, reducing winter feed costs and increasing profitability during the housing period. Grass silage is the basis of most winter-feeding systems in this country and satisfactory animal performance is largely dependent on the adequate intake of good quality silage.

The level of meal feeding on your farm is determined by the quality of your silage. Therefore knowing your silage quality must be the starting point in planning your winter feed when making cost effective decisions on concentrate supplementation.

Silage quality is dependable on vast amounts of elements in production, harvesting and storage. Silage made under poor conditions could leave silage with low dry matter, low digestibility (energy value), low crude protein, high ammonia levels and high acidity. These silage characteristics will give rise to low dry matter intakes and poor animal performance. On the other hand, if the silage is made under good conditions, then better quality silage can be expected and lower meal feeding levels will be required to ensure optimal performance.



Knowing this information before you start feeding animals will help plan for your winter requirements, allow you to correctly assess what supplementary feed you require, and extend fodder stocks. The only way to determine the quality of your silage is to take an accurate sample with a silage corer and send it away for analysis.

## Why do silage testing?

By analysing silage it will allow farmers to supplement animals with the appropriate rate of concentrates to meet the animal's dietary requirements and subsequent performance targets. Therefore, the level of meal feeding required is determined by the quality of the silage produced.

- Silage testing allows the farmer to supplement animals with the appropriate rate of concentrates
- Allows for decisions to be made on achieving dietary requirements depending on the stock type to be fed
- Planning for future production is enhanced by the current results



## Silage quality guidelines for different types of stock

Stage digestibility (DMD%)	Stock type
75%+	Freshly-calved dairy cow (autumn cow)
74%	Spring-calving cows in milk, finishing cattle/lambs, pregnant ewes
72%	Dairy young stock, growing cattle
70%	Dry dairy cow (low BCS), suckler cow in milk
68%	Dry dairy cow (Adequate BCS)
66%	Dry suckler cow (Adequate BCS)



## What a silage analysis report will tell you

The silage sample report will detail the feeding quality characteristics of the silage such as: its dry matter (DM); its digestibility (DMD); the protein content; the fibre content (NDF); the energy value (MJ/UFL); and its intake potential. It will also give the farmer an indication of how well it fermented by measuring the lactic acid concentrated, ammonia and pH level. This will subsequently help ascertain the stability of the silage at feed out.

## How to take a sample

1. Take samples about 6 weeks after harvesting to take samples.
2. Try to ensure minimum time to lab after taking the samples.
3. Using a core sampler take samples from up to five well-spaced points on various areas of the surface on the silage pit.
4. Discard the surface part of each core before mixing into a composite sample to get a weight around 500g.
5. Be sure to reseal holes in bales after sampling to avoid damage.
6. Put the sample into a zip-tie plastic bag. Exclude air, seal well and post immediately.



If you are interested in getting a silage sample taken for forage analysis, please contact your local Bandon Co-op sales representative or a member of the Agri team and we will take care of the rest.